

September 14, 2010

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the enduring legacy of a faith institution in the city of Portsmouth. This year, Third Baptist Church is celebrating its 125th anniversary, and in recognition of this milestone I would like to take a moment to reflect on the history of this esteemed church and its contributions to the greater Portsmouth community.

The original seeds of Third Baptist Church were planted in a schoolhouse on Portsmouth's Chestnut Street in 1885. It was there that Rev. J.W. Godwin and a group of women conceived of the church and held its first services. From this humble beginning, the church grew under the pastorship of Rev. James Garris. It was during the tenure of the third pastor, Rev. Harold Anthony, that the church moved to its present location on the corner of Queen and Godwin streets, then the frontier of the city.

Third Baptist's congregation grew considerably at the new site under the leadership of fourth pastor Rev. Frank Campbell. Rev. Campbell saw the location of the new church, a neighborhood populated by saloons and other morally questionable establishments, as a blessing and opportunity to spread the Word and enlarge the Third Baptist Church family. Due to revivals and outreach efforts, the church outgrew its building, and a new sanctuary was built in 1911, the sanctuary Third Baptist uses to this day.

Third Baptist continued to grow under the leadership of fifth pastor Rev. B.W. Dance. During his 18 years at Third Baptist, the church knew both success and setback. The \$10,000 mortgage was burned in 1920, a pipe organ was installed, and massive improvements to the sanctuary were completed. As the Great Depression swept the country, the Church was not able to escape its effects. But financial hardship was not powerful enough to close the doors of Third Baptist. When the church could not pay the salaries of Rev. Dance, the church organist, sexton, and clerk, they all continued to serve God and the congregation without a paycheck. This continued until the church could afford to pay them half their wages and finally restore their full salaries.

The Church's sixth pastor, Rev. C. J. Washington, was installed in 1939. Under his direction, the church established a building fund and secured property for and erected a parsonage on the southeast corner of Elm Avenue and Glasgow Street.

Third Baptist's seventh pastor, Rev. C.H. Jordan, was installed in 1947. His 31 years of service

encompassed the postwar growth of the city of Portsmouth, and many of the institutions of modern Third Baptist were founded under his leadership. One of the Church's greatest accomplishments of this period was the establishment of a kindergarten and Adult Education Program. Originally housed in the first small Queen Street sanctuary, by 1951, the program had outgrown its facilities, and a new educational building was constructed. Third Baptist continued to expand in the neighborhood, buying a building across Queen Street and renovating it into a Fellowship Hall. Eventually this hall was the only Third Baptist building large enough to hold the education program, and in 1974 the repurposed, renovated, and fully air conditioned facility was dedicated. Rev. Jordan served Third Baptist until his death in 1978.

Third Baptist Church's eighth and current pastor is Rev. Joe B. Fleming. Since 1981, Rev. Fleming has led the church into the 21st century. During his tenure, the position of Youth Minister was established to coordinate a program to meet the needs and expectations of the young members of Third Baptist. The church ushered in a new era in service in 1994 when it named its first two female Deacons to the Diaconate. In October of 2004, the Fleming family added another generation of service to Third Baptist. Rev. Joseph A. Fleming, the son of Rev. Fleming and Mrs. Johnnie Fleming, became the Assistant to the Pastor of Third Baptist Church and currently serves as Supervisor of Ministries.

The Church continues to minister to its community to this day. The education program now includes after school homework assistance. The newly renovated kitchen helps facilitate the weekly feed-the-hungry program and the Meals on Wheels ministry. This enduring legacy of service is due to the efforts of the congregation, some of whom have been members of Third Baptist for over 60 years.

I would like to commend Pastor Fleming and the congregation of Third Baptist Church as they celebrate their 125th anniversary. I hope that their next 125 years of service will be as fruitful as their first 125 years.